

Indiana House of Representatives

News and Information

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STEVENSON TO SEEK GREATER WORKPLACE SAFETY PROTECTIONS IN 2006

GARY – State Rep. Dan Stevenson (D-Highland) said today he will seek passage of legislation in the 2006 session of the Indiana General Assembly that will penalize companies that continually ignore safety violations in the workplace.

Flanked by regional labor leaders and officials and workers with the United Steelworkers of America District 7, Stevenson said his bill, which he dubbed the Corporate Manslaughter Act, would toughen penalties against employers who fail to correct unsafe working conditions that help cause deaths and serious bodily injuries.

Indiana is one of 27 states that saw an increase in workplace fatalities from 2003 to 2004. (Indiana workplace fatalities increased from 132 in 2003 to 153 in 2004.)

"The corporate culture has developed a mind set that it is better to address potential safety violations by paying a small fine instead of actively working to correct the problems," Stevenson said. "Through this bill, I want to make employers understand that there are consequences when they show they don't care about keeping their workers safe."

Stevenson's legislation outlines instances when criminal charges can be entered against employers or their agents. Penalties will range from a Class A misdemeanor (up to a year in prison and a fine up to \$5,000) for negligence leading to bodily injury to a Class C felony (up to eight years in prison and a maximum fine \$10,000) if an employee dies as a result of a knowing or intentional violation of administrative rules.

"This legislation is aimed at situations where a safety violation has been in existence for a lengthy period of time, employees or their union have tried to get the company to correct the matter, and the company chooses to do nothing about it," Stevenson said. "The potential for disaster is there, everyone knows about it, yet the employer ignores it. Since this attitude seems to be keyed on their belief that the bottom line is more important than the safety of their workers, the only way to get their attention is to make sure they receive prison time and financial penalties for their negligence."

USWA Local 1010 President Tom Hargrove, who noted that the legislation originated from meetings conducted by local union presidents, said, "At my plant, Mittal Steel Indiana Harbor East, we have a joint safety program, and we work together diligently to prevent accidents. In a perfect world, this is how it should work, but workers should not have to depend on the good will of the bosses for their safety."

"When the money gets short, safety gets short-changed and workers suffer," he added. "Management is legally responsible for providing a safe workplace. The Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 sends management to jail for willfully stealing money by cooking the books. We need to hold that same management accountable for a willful violation that results in serious injury or death. We feel this level of accountability can be achieved only with the threat of sending management to jail for willful violations."

USWA District 7 Director Jim Robinson said, "We have fought to save good industrial jobs in America, and we will fight to ensure that the workers who do these jobs enjoy their right to a safe and healthy workplace. Passage of the Corporate Manslaughter Act is an important part of that effort."

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This news release can be accessed on the Internet at www.IN.gov/H11